

# THE OBJECTS OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE LECTURESHIP, AND A REVIEW OF DR MORRISON'S LIFE IN CHINA



*W.P. Chen*

*Consul-General for China in Australia*

## *Inaugural Morrison Lecture*

The inaugural lecture dealing with the objects of the foundation of the Lectureship and a review of Dr. Morrison's life in China was delivered in the Lecture Theatre of the Australian Institute of Anatomy, Canberra, on Tuesday evening, 10th May, 1932, by Dr. W.P. Chen.

The chair was occupied by the Honorable the Minister for Health, Major C.W.C. Marr, M.P., D.S.O., M.C., V.D., and on the platform were the Right Honorable J.H. Scullin, P.C., M.P., former Prime Minister of Australia; the Honorable Arthur Blakeley, M.P.; the Honorable A.E. Green, M.P.; Dr. J.H.L. Cumpston, C.M.G., M.D., Director-General of Health, and Sir Colin MacKenzie, M.D., F.R.C.S., Director of the Australian Institute of Anatomy, Canberra.

A cablegram was received from Dr. Wu Lien-Teh, of Shanghai, head of the Quarantine Service of the Republic of China, wishing "heartiest success for the inaugural address, with hopes that the desired cultural objects will be obtained". Apologies for absence were also received from Senator J.F. Guthrie, who was a schoolfellow at the Geelong College with Dr. Morrison, and Mr. William Ah Ket, Barrister-at-Law, Melbourne.

After the address, Lady MacKenzie held a reception and supper in honour of the distinguished lecturer, in the Northern Museum of the Institute.

*Address*

Gentlemen: I consider it is not only a high honour, but a great privilege that my position as Consul-General for China in Australia has brought to me the opportunity of delivering this—the first address under the Lectureship established by Chinese and Australian citizens who are known to be keenly interested in the Australian-Chinese question.

Since this lecture is the first, it must be to a certain extent of an introductory and explanatory nature. It will, in part, be devoted to an explanation of the origin and objects of the foundation of the Lectureship. In logical sequence will be given a review of the life of the man, whose work inspired the founders to dedicate the Lectureship to his memory, and brief sketch of the cultural development of China will mark its conclusion. It is known that citizens are keenly desirous of cultivating trading relationships with China. It is none the less important that the cultural relationship with that great country should receive equal encouragement, especially at this time, when so much thought is being directed to the Chinese people.

The Chinese community in Australia is grateful to Sir Colin MacKenzie for originally proposing this Lectureship. Having sown the seed, the idea grew and flourished, being taken up with enthusiasm by patriotic Chinese Nationals and Australian friends. The object of establishing the Lectureship is to bring the art, science, literature and culture of China before the people of the Commonwealth, in order to stimulate and maintain the best possible relationship between the Australian and Chinese people. Economic aspects will also be dealt with from time to time, so that the series should be one of great interest and value.

In order to understand why the founders desired to perpetuate the memory of Dr. Morrison, one must understand his connexion with China, and for that reason the work he did in the few years previous to his untimely death in 1920, is a key to this understanding. In July, 1912, he was appointed Political Adviser to the President of the Republic of China, which post he held until after the conclusion of the Great War in 1918. A short resume of the life of the man who rose so high, will reveal his character and those attributes which brought to him that recognition of his talents which he deserved.

George Ernest Morrison was born in Geelong, Victoria, in 1862. He was educated at Geelong College (of which his father was Principal) but early showed himself possessed of the spirit of adventure and courage by walking, while yet a schoolboy, from Queenscliff to Adelaide (500 miles). On another occasion he paddled a canoe down the Murray River for 1,500 miles. Later he shipped as seaman (for journalistic purposes mainly) on board a schooner engaged in Kanaka trade between Queensland and the South Sea Islands. Towards the end of 1882 he walked from Normanton,

on the Gulf of Carpentaria, to Geelong (2,000 miles), while in 1883, after one year's study of medicine, he interrupted this to lead a pioneer expedition to New Guinea, where, unfortunately, he was speared. All these journeys showed his early desire to become an explorer, though his father preferred medicine for him, and sent him to Edinburgh. Realizing the value of this training, he studied seriously. His tall, athletic frame was hampered by the spear wounds he had received in New Guinea, and he took no part in sport. His recreation lay in long nocturnal rambles with his thoughts running on abstruse, academic subjects. His intellectual recreation he found in works of travel and biographies of famous men. He became an encyclopaedia of knowledge of explorers and their journeys. He finished his medical course with success in 1887, and two years later he was admitted M.D. Edinburgh University. He made various journeys in the United States and Jamaica, visited Spain (where he acted as medical officer on the tin mines for three years), Morocco, and other parts of Northern Africa. He returned to Australia, and was appointed Medical Officer of Ballarat Hospital. But the wanderlust again seized him, and, in 1894, he went to Japan, and after travelling the islands, crossed to China, and commenced his famous journey across the country—up the Yangtze Valley and through Burma to Rangoon. In 1895 he published his book *An Australian in China*—a diary of that journey. I commend this book to you. It attracted the attention of Moberly Bell, then editor of *The Times*, who engaged Morrison as *The Times* correspondent, first at Siam, then in Peking, a post he held until 1912. He made other journeys, satisfying his desire to become a journalist-explorer. His services through the Boxer War and through the succeeding troubles and wars in China were of exceptional value to the British Foreign Office, as well as to his newspaper. Though his medical skill was not practised professionally, he was able to help both Chinese and Europeans, who in turn furnished him with secret and reliable information, which was invaluable to him as a journalist. Despatches were always dogmatic statements of facts, which *The Times* accepted without question. Whatever he wrote had the accuracy of the historian with the prescience of a statesman.

Missionaries regarded him as a guide, philosopher and friend. His book of 1895 rather discounted missionaries, but he afterwards stated he had judged hastily, in the superficial way of cocksure youth. After long residence, he knew the sterling worth and admirable work of the missionaries. In 1905 he was present at the triumphal entry into Port Arthur. He later in this year represented *The Times* at the Peace Conference held at Portsmouth. In 1907 he crossed China from Peking to the French border of Tonquin. In 1910 he rode from Honan City, in Central China, to Andijan, in Russo-Turkestan (3,750 miles), in 175 days, or less than six months. The appointment to which I referred in my opening sentences was given to him—that of Political Adviser to the Republic of China, with the approval

of all sides. This appointment and honoured post he held until he went to Paris in 1919, accompanying the Delegate to the Peace Conference. In 1920 he revisited England, and died there on 30th May, 1920, leaving a wife and three sons, the eldest seventeen. His wife has since died.

Enough has been gleaned from this short sketch of Dr. Morrison's life to indicate the attributes of his character which made him famous. To quote the *Argus*, "Morrison's life is like a story from the Arabian Nights, wonderful yet unintelligible—romantic—yet there is nothing romantic in a man being driven from pillar to post by whip he does not understand. His greatness lay in his simplicity, and in his sublime selflessness."

A contemporary war correspondent, Colonel Lionel James, the author of *High Pressure*, *Times of Stress*, and other records of service as war correspondent, put on record in the latter book, a character sketch of a much loved colleague and a very great Britisher, culled from notes made during months of intimate association with him in the Far East. This character sketch was reprinted from the original by Colonel James in *Nineteenth Century and After*, the issue of July, 1920. I cannot do better than give you this pen picture:—"To pretend you knew this great man was to affect the unattainable. It was difficult to advance beyond the standpoint of a trusted acquaintance. Even those who imagined they were intimate with him would suddenly discover that there was still a Morrison incomprehensible to them. During my first few weeks of his acquaintance, I came under the spell of his many-sided greatness. I was inspired by his seriousness; elevated by his humour; impressed by his infinite capacity for taking pains; chastened by his manly dignity; delighted by his kindly character and love for children; terrified by his unerring memory; appalled by his cold judgment on men and matters; enticed by his fearless vanity, and overwhelmed by his pride in Australia, and in himself, as an Australian".

Colonel James has also given us some delightful cameos—literary gems in a setting of understanding. One of these is here placed on record "Morrison loved to talk in moments of unbending—when his exquisite sense of humour got the better of his uncanny armour of reserve". Or again "Morrison, the Almost Ambassador"—or yet again "Morrison was overflowing with the milk of human kindness, though in combating insincerity and incompetence he was hard as a rock, and relentless as a Prussian", "This Artist in mental agility", "Few were ever permitted even a glimpse of the warm human patch of real affection in his golden heart".

Now that the life and character of the man have been revealed, we may pass on to a brief review of Dr. Morrison's life in China. I have already quoted his actual journeyings. These prove many things. They prove that his knowledge of the people of China, and of China itself, was first-hand knowledge, gained by comprehensive tours North, South, East and West, and by his personal contact with many and widely differing types of

Chinese people. Some of the observations on these journeys are of particular interest and value, because they give to the world actual facts gleaned by a man of strong personality and unerring judgment.

In one he travelled 1,500 miles up the Yangtze River, followed by an excursion for another 1,500 miles along the great overland highway into Burma. He spoke no Chinese, had no interpreter or companion, and was unarmed, trusting implicitly in the good faith of the Chinese. This faith was never betrayed.

He went to China possessed with the strong racial antipathy to the Chinese common to his countrymen. That feeling quickly gave way to one of lively sympathy and gratitude, since he invariably experienced uniform kindness and hospitality, and most charming courtesy.

His tribute to the Chinese wife of an Englishman, and through her, to Chinese women generally, is interesting. To quote him, "The smile of a Chinese woman is inexpressibly charming. I have seen girls in China who would be considered beautiful in any capital in Europe. They are intellectual, chaste and modest".

A poetic description of one scene in his voyage, "All day we sailed along through beautiful country. From the hill tops to the water's edge the hillsides were levelled into a succession of terraces; there were cereals, the poppy, pretty hamlets, and thriving villages, a river thronged with river craft—back in the distance, snow-clad mountains". And again, "All day I toiled over the mountains, climbing and descending wooded steeps, through groves of pine, with an ever changing landscape before me, beautiful with running water, cascades and waterfalls tumbling down the river, and magnificent glens and gorges and picturesque temples on the mountain tops".

Dr. Morrison had the power of impressing his personality upon a strange people, and calling out their confidence. He belonged to the set of men whose lives and conduct might appear erratic—unusual, but this erratic behaviour had been merely the safety valve of an extraordinary ascendancy over tribes, and races, and nations. He was a man of whom Australia must be proud, and of whom China was proud. He was a Great Australian.

Having concluded a review of the life of Dr. Morrison, I will pass to my third and concluding point—a brief sketch of the cultural development of China. To trace the progress of national culture is to trace the development of education, since culture is based on learning.

The written language of China was in existence 4,000 years ago, in hieroglyphic form, being recorded on bamboo rods, split about two or three feet long. The language was carved on these rods. A small pamphlet of the present time would require a whole cartload of these sticks! Many of these old schools had but one "book" for the whole school. Silk was

then introduced for the recording of written characters. It was certainly less unwieldy than handling bamboos. Paper was invented in the first century by a man who gained his inspiration from the humble wasp. At the present time, manuscripts of 1,800 years old, made of paper, are still preserved, but silk manuscripts only last through a period of about 500 years, and there are no very old silk manuscripts extant.

With the overthrow of the Manchu Dynasty and the awakening of New China, agitation for learning increased. Since 1902, schools have sprung up everywhere. Temples have been converted into schools, and in the large cities, idols were smashed. In the interior where superstition ruled, fearing to offend the spirits, the idols, instead of being broken into fragments, were packed away. The main halls were converted into schools. Education progressed slowly because of the hieroglyphic nature of the language. For that reason, a phonetic system was invented, and after a long conference, with two representatives from each province, one system was adopted as the universal language. It is not generally known that China and Japan originally had one language. When in Japan, I could have asked a Japanese policeman at a street corner for direction, by writing. So also in Korea. In other words, the spoken language differed in different districts or places, but the written language was the same. Now, however, the phonetic systems differ entirely in the different countries.

Education has such a strong civilizing force, that it is the real medium between humanity and the new civilization. Therefore, education to the Chinese nation is a very important subject when their civilization is changing from an ancient to a modern one. To the Chinese, education is no new thing, since the nation is well known for its literature. But in the scientific sense it becomes very new. It is, therefore, to young China, trained in the modern school system, that we must look for the new intellect.

Besides the Government system, private schools, which are established and managed by Chinese educationalists, and also those established under the auspices of the foreign missions, though not recognized by the Government, have hitherto occupied a very conspicuous place in China and have produced year by year a very considerable number of intellectuals. Many of the mission educational institutions have a much longer history than those of the Chinese Nationals, and have been responsible for many thousands of intellectual workers in the modern training.

Many vigorous attempts have been made in the past to reform the Chinese educational system, and, since the establishment of the Republic, the Minister for Education has brilliantly and exhaustively studied this vital question and even undertaken much research into the possibility of obligatory education. This is of great importance, not only to every Chinese citizen, but to foreigners throughout the world. There is a significance in the recently declared order that Primary Schools are to drop the

study of literary Chinese. Pupils in the first six grades are to be permitted only to study the Kuo Yu (spoken language). Lovers of classics deplored the edict. Literary Chinese possesses an extraordinary fascination to have perpetuated itself through the ages. It has been surrounded by a halo of aristocracy, and only a small minority can become adept in its use. But in this democratic age, aristocracy is in disfavour, and China, to fall into line, must give up the aristocratic learning for a spoken language, and the Primary Schools are good places to press these reforms.

Though Peiping is no longer the capital of political China, it occupies a far more important place than that. It is the capital of cultural China, the centre of Chinese educational trends, and it is these things that are eventually responsible for the decisions of the politicians. The undercurrent of modernism cannot be seen or touched, but its inevitable trend is sensed in the atmosphere.

The educational policy of China in the future cannot be independent. Education is closely connected with other social, political and economic institutions. To reform education, the present state of these must be taken into consideration.

It is probably true that the fundamental cause of the turmoil in China to-day is the backwardness of education. In order to obtain true economic independence we have to develop industrial education. In order to protect China in the family of nations, we have to develop the military education. In order to hold China responsible for national affairs, we have to develop the general education.

Other phases of national culture are evidenced in the paintings, the hand-wrought ornaments, the brasswork, and so on, which have been handed down through the generations. With regard to handcraft work, ancient paintings are still in existence, also hand-wrought vases and pieces of priceless value, showing that art in China was known over 2,000 years ago. A few years ago, for instance, a vase, 200 B.C., was bought by a Shantung curio dealer for 5 dollars. This man kept the knowledge of its great value to himself, but, during his temporary absence, it was sold from his shop for 200 dollars. He was so grieved and so sadly disappointed that the loss of this vase, of nearly half a million dollar value, caused him to pine away and die. To this day, valuable antiques are preserved. In the home of wealthy merchants in Shanghai are priceless porcelains and carvings on ivory and jade, while the Antique Preservation Commission, of Peking, houses many valuable pieces.

With regard to ancient paintings, many are still extant which were done on paper. There is, in the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C., a valuable collection of ancient Chinese works of art. In Tokyo, the magnificent Fine Art Galleries, filled with ancient Chinese paintings, were lost in flames, with all their contents.

Brasswork is an even older art, and no energy is spared in manufacturing the instruments for sacrificial purposes.

The science of astronomy has been traced to the year, 2,200 B.C., when an astronomer was beheaded by the reigning Emperor for so neglecting his duty as to miscalculate the date of the sun's eclipse.

The first observatory was built in Peking 1272 A.D., over 300 years before the first European observatory was built. This building is of historic interest, for though the instruments, 70 feet above ground level, are in the open, exposed to the sun, rain, frost, and snow, no rust is apparent, since they are made of an alloy, the composition of which is lost art.

A discourse on cultural development cannot be complete without reference to religion—that part of civilization which turns to God, to pure thoughts and high ideals.

The religions of China have been classed under four headings—

1. Confucianism
2. Taoism
3. Buddhism
4. Mohammedism.

Confucianism and Taoism are indigenous, Buddhism and Mohammedism being brought into the country. For more than 100 years, missionaries of many religions have worked in the land of China, and their influence is felt in many spheres.

Although Confucius was born in 551 B.C., he was not the originator of that cult, but the interpreter of it, since it was due to him that Confucianism was promoted, developed and exalted. Strictly speaking, it is not a religion at all, but a code of moral ethics, and of philosophy. It teaches the relation between man and man, it teaches filial love, the honouring of father and mother. Due to this, China worships the past, unlike European nations, which give much of the attention and pleasure to the younger generation. Under the influence of Confucius, down through the ages, Chinese people have developed into a race, patient, long suffering, tolerant under all circumstances—traits of character which have lasted to the present day.

I cannot conclude my lecture without expressing the hope that the influence of a man of the calibre of Dr. Morrison will remain a vital force, and that this recital of his life and character will rouse my hearers to emulation. Just as Dr. Morrison loved and trusted the Chinese people as a race, it is my earnest hope that the Australian people will extend to my countrymen sympathy and trust, and that the great nation of China may yet be united with the great Anglo-Saxon race to preserve the peace of the world.





*Morrison in Western China, 1894*